

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, Feb. 2, 2004

CONTACT:

Mary Broz – (804) 367-9142

Remember the ABCs and 123s When Hiring Professional Services *DPOR kicks off National Consumer Protection Week with tips for smart buying*

RICHMOND – The Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) has joined federal, state, and local agencies and advocacy organizations to launch the sixth annual National Consumer Protection Week (Feb. 1-7, 2004). This year's theme – *Financial Literacy: Earning a Lifetime of Dividends* – focuses on the skills consumers need to make smart decisions in the marketplace and ensure a solid financial future.

Arm yourself with basic skills before entering into financial transactions for professional services – whether you are hiring a contractor, buying a hearing aid, bidding at an auction, or in the market for real estate.

BEFORE YOU BUY OR SIGN A CONTRACT:

- **Deal only with properly licensed professionals** who meet state standards for expertise and performance. Virginia requires licensure for dozens of professions and occupations, ranging from architects and contractors to auctioneers and real estate agents.
- **Ask friends and neighbors** for referrals. An advertisement in the telephone book or on television is not necessarily a good indication of quality.
- **Get everything in writing – and read the fine print.** You might assume that a “contract” should look like a contract, but anything you sign could be used as a legal document. Do not sign anything until you completely understand what you are signing, and agree to all the terms.
- **Don't pay 100% of the bill until the job is 100% complete.** Try to limit your down payment and do not allow payments to get ahead of the work. Never pay cash, and keep all canceled checks or credit card receipts.
- **Take your time!** Never allow yourself to be rushed into making a decision or purchase. And remember the old adage, “If the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is!”

For more information about financial literacy and National Consumer Protection Week, visit www.consumer.gov/ncpw.

###

About DPOR

The Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) administers and enforces laws regulating 31 commercial occupations and certain professions. The agency licenses or certifies more than 250,000 individuals and businesses ranging from architects and contractors to cosmetologists and professional wrestlers.

DPOR investigates reports of regulatory violations by licensees; pursues complaints of criminal activity by unlicensed practitioners; responds to business-related consumer inquiries and requests for license checks; administers recovery funds for consumers harmed in contractor or real estate transactions; and conducts mediation services and public awareness campaigns.

For more information, visit DPOR online at www.dpor.state.va.us.